

# Family Independence Initiative Pilot Project



## Questions and Answers

*Alameda County will pilot the Family Independence Initiative (FII) project for three years from April 1, 2003, through March 31, 2006*

- **What is FII?**  
FII is a three-year pilot project designed to help Alameda County's low-income families, including CalWORKs families, achieve self-sufficiency. By working with groups of families in their communities, FII uses affinity-based social networks and financial incentives for families to work together toward economic stability.
- **Who is the project sponsor?**  
The Alameda County Social Services Agency, in partnership with FII representatives, is responsible for this project. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) provides technical assistance, monitors progress of the project, and receives quarterly reports.
- **What is the source of funding?**  
The three-year budget is \$3 million and is from various private foundations.
- **What is the authority for this pilot?**  
The authority for CalWORKs clients to participate in this project is provided through a waiver granted by CDSS under the Welfare & Institutions Code. The waiver exempts FII CalWORKs clients from having their benefits reduced. Through the 2002 Farm Bill, the Food Stamp programs regarding income and resources were also aligned with the sections waived for CalWORKs.
- **How many families will be involved?**  
Approximately 200 families will participate in the three-year pilot.
- **What does "affinity-based" mean?**  
"Affinity-based" defines a set of friends, family, or networks which share values and common goals. These self-defined relationships are often based on cultural/ethnic experiences and networks of individuals with strong ties or social bonds.
- **What do families have to do to participate in FII?**  
Families must agree to participate in the program for three years. The families also attend monthly group meetings, provide baseline and updated financial information, submit monthly progress reports, and utilize computers and e-mail to communicate with FII. Some participants also help to recruit additional families.
- **What program services will be provided?**  
Families are eligible to receive a computer with one year of internet access and basic computer training. FII serves as the link to community resources and information that leads to education, housing, jobs, entrepreneurial opportunities, and ultimately a sustainable lifestyle.
- **What are the expected outcomes of this pilot?**  
By rewarding peer support networks that assist one another out of poverty, FII families will recruit others to their groups and communities to pass on what they have learned and help continue the cycle of success and climb out of poverty. Families may receive up to a maximum of \$3000 per year, based on their achievement of identified goals. In addition, Individual Development Account holders receive matching funds, up to \$2000 per year over two years. These funds may be saved for education expenses, home-ownership and/or business development.
- **How do the financial incentives impact CalWORKs families?**  
With the CDSS waiver, CalWORKs families will not lose nor have their benefits reduced by participating in FII. FII's financial incentives will not be calculated in the income and asset limits that determine CalWORKs or food stamps eligibility.